

i never wanted trouble (but i sure got enough) by QueenWithABeeThrone

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Summary:

“Eyes on the road!” screams Mike.

“Our parents will kill you if you crash this car!” yells Lucas.

or: what happens when you cram six kids and three teenagers into a stolen van and put them on the road to stopping the apocalypse. again.

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Author's Note:

title from Joan Jett and the Blackhearts' "Victim of Circumstance".

my grip on these characters is not the best, but this begged to be written. WELP.

It takes three months, but the next almost-apocalypse arrives with multiple explosions, the Mind Flayer's second attempt at invading Hawkins by invading a nearby county instead, and some new threat that has *tentacles*, of all things. Steve is going to have nightmares about vines and tentacles forever.

But, weirdly enough, that's not what stands out in his memory.

What does is this.

--

"Oh my god," says Steve, when all six shitheads show up. Most of them are carrying something that could be conceivably used as a weapon, and Steve notes with some concern that Max dug up a nail gun somewhere and Will has a baseball bat. Without nails hammered in, thankfully.

Eleven, or Jane, or El is not carrying any weapon, but when Steve opens his mouth to ask her, she just gives him a *look*.

Right. This is the same girl who closed a skyscraper-high gate to another dimension last year with the power of her mind.

"You can't all fit in the backseat," he says, but he opens the door anyway.

"Thanks, man," Lucas says, clambering into the backseat first. "I call the window seat!"

"That's fine," says Dustin, "I call—"

"Dibs on shotgun!" yells Nancy, out of nowhere, and Dustin turns and looks *utterly betrayed*. "Shit, sorry about this, Steve—"

"Our car broke down," Jonathan explains, just behind Nancy.

"You can't both fit in the *front*," says Steve, horrified. Jesus Christ. His ex and friend and still-crush, his other friend and crush, and the six shitty little kids, all crammed into the *same car*. This is going to be an unholy nightmare.

"Why are you *here*," says Mike. "I thought you were out of town doing that—thing!"

"Our thing led to your thing," Nancy explains, "and anyway, the more of us over fifteen, the better." She shoots the kids *a look*.

Dustin says, "Steve manages fine," which, thanks, little man. Steve ruffles his hair.

"Steve got his ass kicked by my stepbrother while trying to protect us," Max says.

"And it was awesome," says Dustin, loyally.

"Also painful," Lucas adds.

Nancy's jaw tenses like she very badly wants to throw Billy Hargrove to the demodogs herself. Jonathan's eyebrows go up into his hair.

"...yeah, we're coming," Jonathan says.

"We're going to need a bigger car," Will pipes up.

"Hopper took the police van already, though," says Mike. "We can't use that."

"My stepdad has a van," Max volunteers.

"We are not *stealing your stepdad's van*," says Steve, hotly. "You little shits get caught, I'm gonna be in trouble too. *Not happening*."

Nancy, dear, sweet, darling Nancy, says, "I can hotwire a van."

"I can draw Billy away," says Jonathan, with a shrug.

"*What*," says Steve. "Hey, *no*—"

"This is a democracy," says Dustin, cheerfully, "all in favor of hotwiring Max's shitty stepdad's van so we can all go to Pawnee and save their asses from oblivion, say *aye*."

"That is *not how this works*—"

"Aye!" comes the overwhelming chorus of voices. Steve buries his face in his hands and lets out a long, slow breath.

--

They steal Neil Hargrove's van.

"It *smells* in here," says Mike, wrinkling his nose.

"Smells bad," El agrees. "Like—a plant."

"You're the ones who voted for it, not me," Steve tells them, climbing into the driver's seat. The van's roomier than his car, that's for certain, but with all the shit the kids are bringing along the back is still a little crowded.

So now Nancy and Jonathan are in the front, too.

This is going to be a long car ride.

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Dustin says, twenty minutes after they've exited Hawkins, "Uh, guys? I, uh. Really need to go to the bathroom."

Steve pulls over and says, "Go."

"In the *bushes*?" says Dustin.

"You should've gone before you climbed in here!" Steve says.

"I was busy!" says Dustin.

"You were cramming snacks into your bag," says Lucas. "No one needs that much 3 Musketeers. *No one.*"

"I do," says Dustin, defensively.

"It's nougat!"

"It's good!"

"Hey, stop arguing!" Nancy yells.

"They're gonna keep going," says Steve. He knows how these kids work now.

"Nougat tastes bad," El puts in now. "It's disgusting. Sorry, Dustin."

"*Why*," Dustin half-shouts.

Steve meets Jonathan's horrified gaze and mouths, *Sorry*. He hadn't thought to warn him about this, poor bastard.

--

Ten minutes after that, Jonathan turns the radio on. Predictably, he turns it to The Clash.

Will pipes up, "Can you turn it up?"

Things are relatively peaceful for about four minutes, which Steve is deeply grateful for, because apparently nothing gets the kids to listen like guitar riffs and *should I stay or should I go*.

The trouble starts when The Clash fades away, and a pop song comes on.

"*Ugh*, change the station," says Max.

Jonathan's already about to change the channel when:

"No, keep it, I like it!" says Lucas.

"It's a *terrible* song," says Will, who has apparently inherited his brother's musical tastes.

“Yeah, I’m changing the station,” says Jonathan.

“No, you’re not,” says Steve, “I *like* this song.” He looks at the kids in the rear view mirror and says, “And if you tell anyone I said that I’ll kick your asses.”

“*Sure*,” says Mike, sardonic.

“It’s *so bad*,” says Will, plaintively.

Jonathan switches the station, because the guy loves his brother, and also because he looks Steve dead in the eye while he’s doing it, like he’s challenging him.

Then the station, by itself, switches back.

“I like this song,” says El.

“*Why*,” says Mike, looking betrayed by El’s music tastes.

Jonathan switches the station again. Joan Jett’s voice screams out, *hello, daddy, hello, mom, I’m your—*

The station switches back.

Nancy, sandwiched between Jonathan and Steve, starts twitching a little. Then she lightly smacks Jonathan’s hand and switches the station herself to the news. “We need to keep ourselves updated on whatever the hell is going on,” she says.

--

It lasts twenty minutes.

Then El cocks her head and the station switches back.

“*Every move you make, every breath you take, I’ll be watching you—*”

“Oh, hell,” says Steve, as the argument in the back starts up again.

--

“Are we there yet?” Dustin says.

"You asked that *five minutes ago*," says Steve.

"Well, are we?"

"No."

--

"How long till we get there?" says Mike.

"An hour," says Steve. Nancy has fallen asleep on his lap. He glances at Jonathan, and the guy doesn't seem to mind, just watches her with a small smile on his face. He looks up at Steve, and their eyes lock.

For a moment too long, Steve's transfixed.

Then:

"Eyes on the road!" screams Mike.

"Our parents will kill you if you crash this car!" yells Lucas.

Steve screams a little, and swerves away from the signpost, just in time.

"Eyes *off my brother*," says Will from the back, and huh, good to know Joyce Byers is passing on her terrifying protectiveness genes to her youngest, too.

--

Nancy wakes up.

She says, "Who changed the station again?"

"Do *not*," Steve says. "Getting them all to agree on this one was a pain."

"I still don't like it!" Mike says from the back.

"I like this station," says Nancy.

"I hate it even more!"

--

Max says, "Guys, I think I just found my stepdad's porn stash."

"What, really?" says Will.

Steve nearly rams a tree, so fast does he pull over. Jonathan, who's just about to nod off, comes awake so fast that Steve's impressed.

--

They burn the porn.

Outside the van, the place smells bad enough.

"You guys are overreacting to this," says Dustin, from the back of the van, swinging his legs. "We're not *ten*, we know what dicks are. Plus, you don't have any problems calling us dicks."

"And shithheads," Will says, munching on a chocolate bar.

"And little shits," says Max.

"And assholes," says Lucas.

"Shitheads," says El, like she's trying the word out.

"It's one thing for me to call you dicks," says Steve, "it's another for me to *show* you dicks." It's probably illegal, in fact. Yeesh, Max's stepdad keeps this around? It's like all the guys in her family are sleazy.

"Also Mom would kill us if we let you see that," Jonathan explains, to Will specifically, because Joyce Byers is a pretty good mom and also the most terrifying person Steve has ever met when her kids are in danger. "Steve, in particular. He's kind of responsible for all of you now, me and Nancy are helping out."

"I guess," says Will. "He's kinda cool now. I wouldn't want Mom to get mad at him for something out of his control."

Steve preens a little.

--

Halfway to Pawnee, and most of the kids are asleep. Save Will and Dustin, chatting quietly away.

“Do you think Steve’s—” Will starts, quietly.

“Yep,” says Dustin.

Steve can tell, almost immediately, what they’re *not* saying. Almost unwillingly, he looks at Jonathan, just to make sure he’s asleep, and catches Nancy’s eye instead.

He’s expecting—disgust, maybe. Anger.

Instead she just looks at him, sadly. *I’m sorry* hangs in the air between them, and Steve looks away quickly before he can, like, drive the van into a tree or something.

She says, “I—wish we could hang out more.” An olive branch. A peace offering. They haven’t really hung out lately, she’s been giving him his space.

He misses her.

He misses Jonathan, even.

“Me too,” he says, wistfully.

(“This is sad,” says Dustin, watching the three of them from the back. Steve’s pining away for two people like a sadsack, this sucks. Dustin kind of wants to cry for him. “I’m sad. Jesus Christ. We gotta do something.”

Will pulls a face. “After we do this,” he promises, which, nice. “There’s a movie coming out. Maybe we can pool our money together and get them tickets.”

“I like the way you think,” says Dustin, approvingly.)